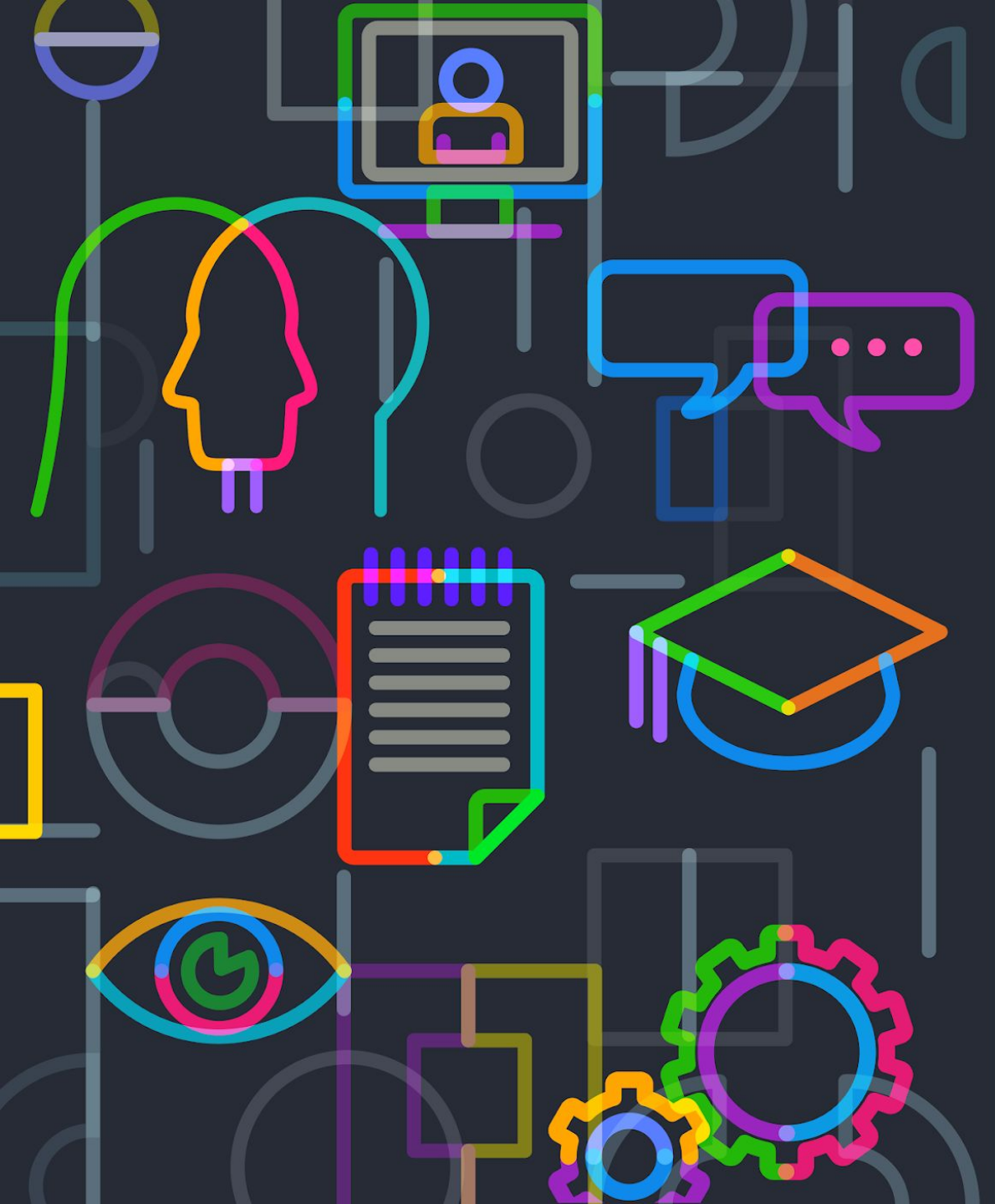# Understanding Chronic Absenteeism

Dr. Shirley Vargas, Dr. Kim Larson, and Lane Carr

Objectives

- Provide clarity around chronic absenteeism definition and accountability indicator

- Discuss root causes of absenteeism

- Share strategies and resources for addressing student absences

- Answer any questions

Mission:

To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living.

Goal:

Ensure all Nebraskans, regardless of background or circumstances, have equitable access to opportunities for success.

Goal:

Increase the number of Nebraskans who are ready for success in postsecondary education, career, and civic life.

Goal:

Ensure the education system, including the Nebraska Department of Education, are taking charge of their roles and responsibilities to provide leadership and enhance school support systems in the state.

Educational Equity

Educational equity means all students have meaningful access to the educational resources they need at the right moment, at the right level, and with the right intensity to not only reach high expectations for learning, but also to discover and explore their passions and make meaningful connections within the context of their postsecondary interests, careers, and civic lives.
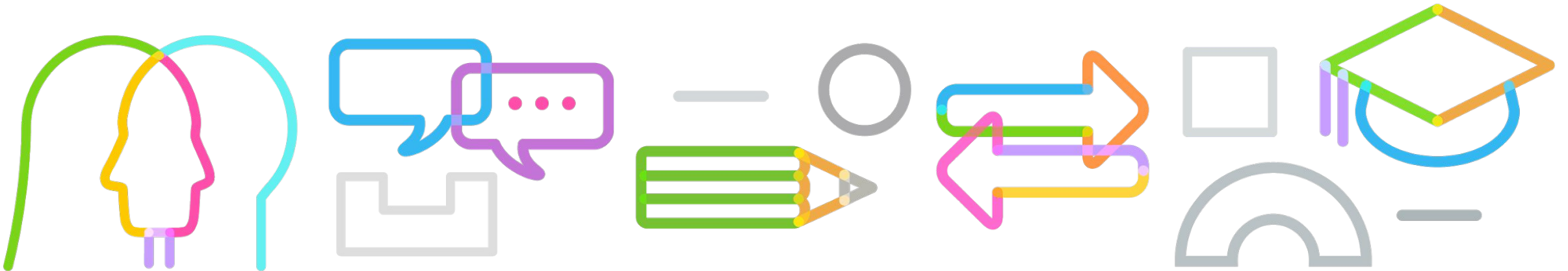
School Improvement Core Beliefs

We believe:

- ...in the value of work already taking place in schools.
- ...all schools can improve.
- ...it's not our students' fault.
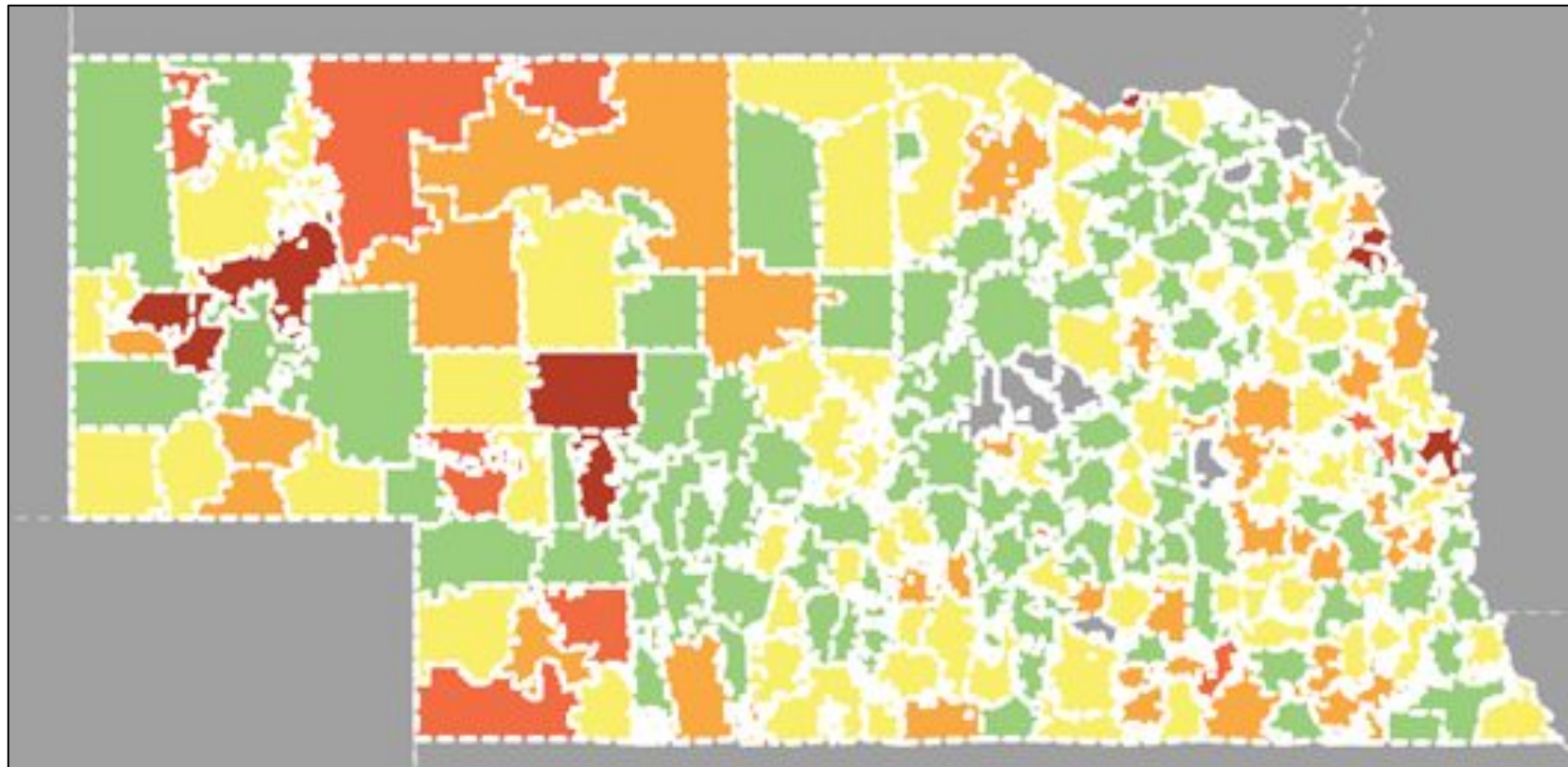- ...school improvement is fundamentally about equity.

What comes to mind when you hear chronic absenteeism?
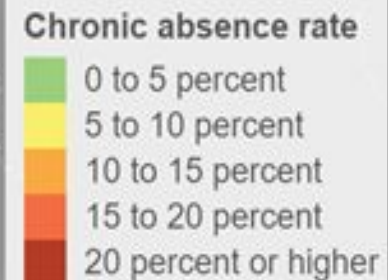
Type responses into chat box

What is Chronic Absenteeism?

- A student is chronically absent when they miss 10% of their time in membership
    (e.g., 5 out of 50 days, 18 out of 180 days)
- Counts all absences - excused, unexcused, suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
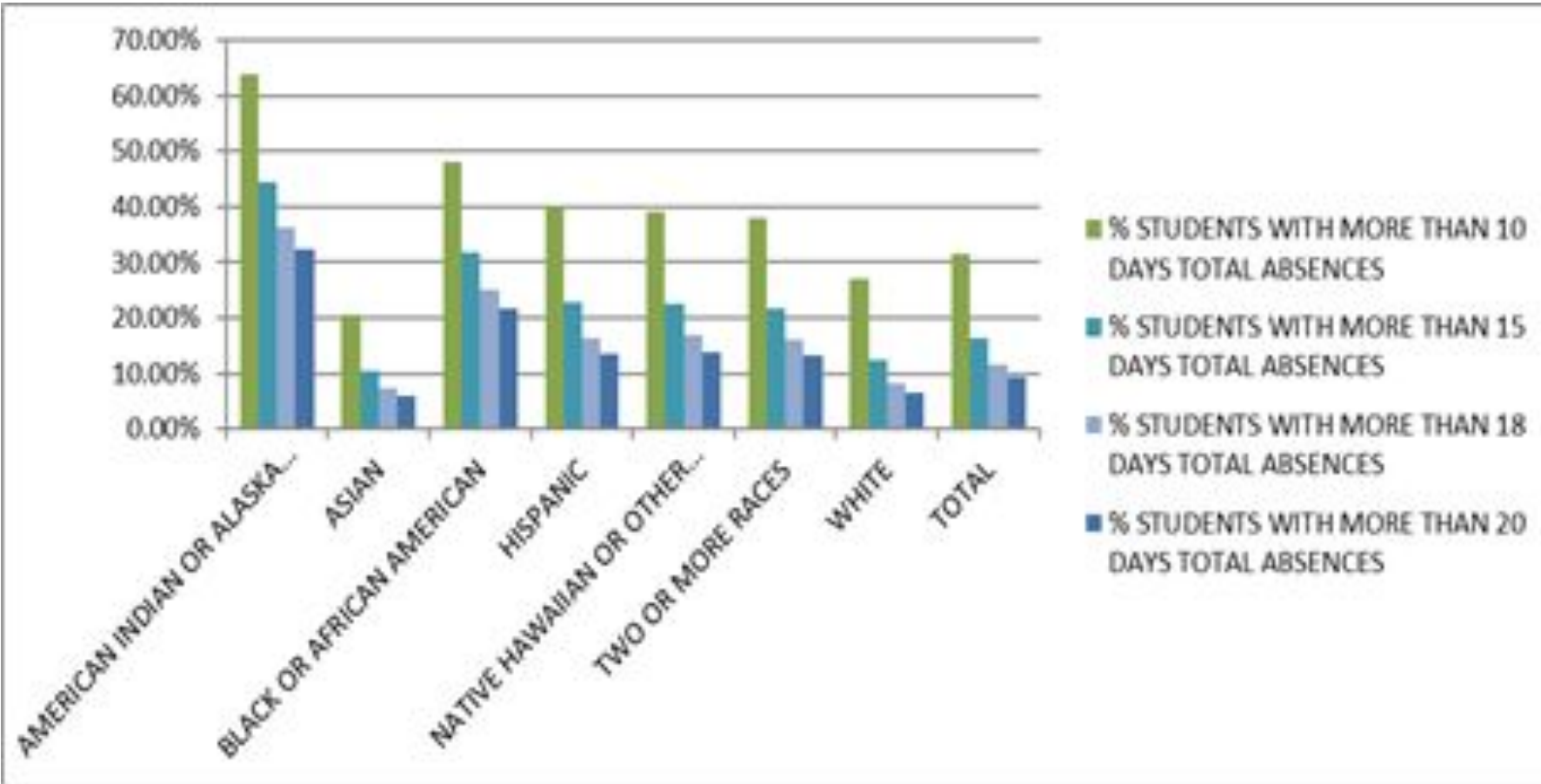- Fundamentally different from truancy

What is the extent of the problem in Nebraska?

In the 2017-18 school year, **36,000 students or 11%,** were chronically absent.
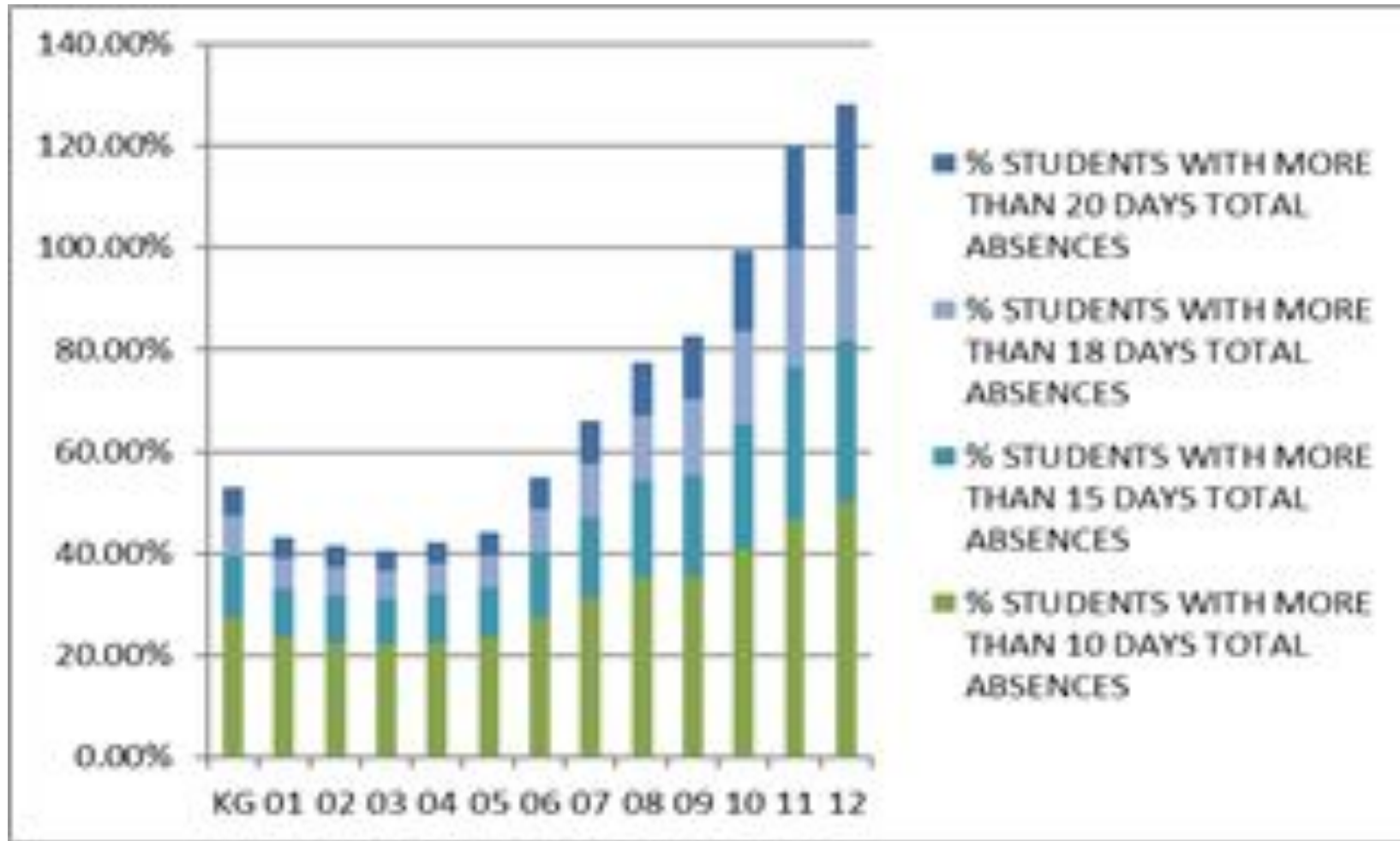
Chronic absence rate
- 0 to 5 percent
- 5 to 10 percent
- 10 to 15 percent
- 15 to 20 percent
- 20 percent or higher

Chronic Absence in Nebraska

Legend:
- % STUDENTS WITH MORE THAN 10 DAYS TOTAL ABSENCES
- % STUDENTS WITH MORE THAN 15 DAYS TOTAL ABSENCES
- % STUDENTS WITH MORE THAN 18 DAYS TOTAL ABSENCES
- % STUDENTS WITH MORE THAN 20 DAYS TOTAL ABSENCES

*In Nebraska, like much of the rest of the country, **students with disabilities, students of color**, and students from **low socio-economic** backgrounds are disproportionately chronically absent.*

Chronic Absence in Nebraska

In Nebraska, like much of the rest of the country, **students in the earliest grades**, and especially those in **later grades**, are more chronically absent.

Why Chronic Absence was included in AQuESTT

- Chronic absence is a measure of educational equity
- Chronic absence may serve as a "canary in a coal mine"
- Chronic absence is correlated to worsened academic performance AND lifetime outcomes
- ESSA required a "5th Indicator" of school quality and student success
- Districts have been reporting chronic absence for at least 5 years

How Chronic Absence Affects Classification and Designation

Classification - Rating schools

Designation - Supporting schools

- Priority schools - three schools, supported by state funding

- Comprehensive Support & Improvement (CSI)
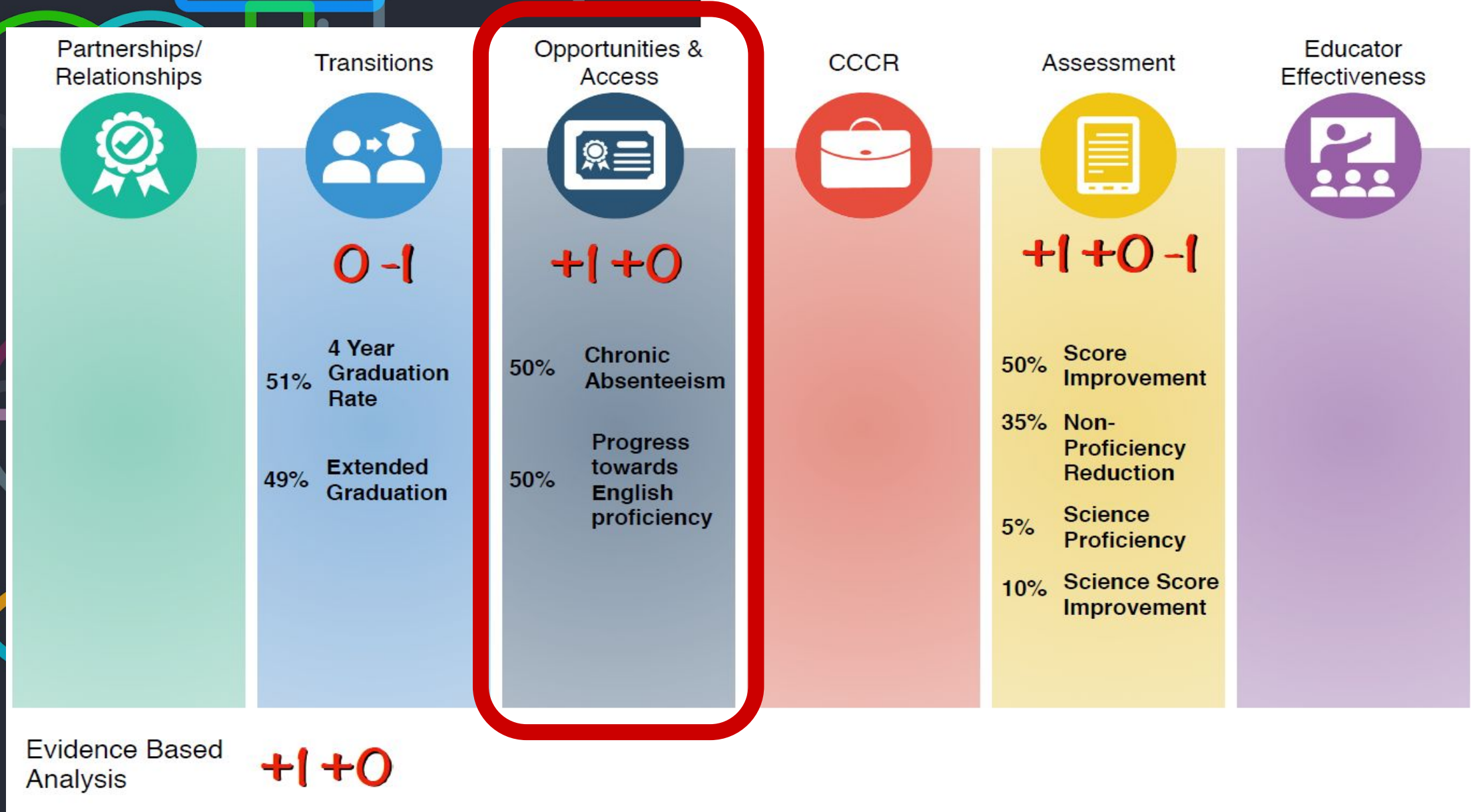
- Targeted Support & Improvement (TSI)

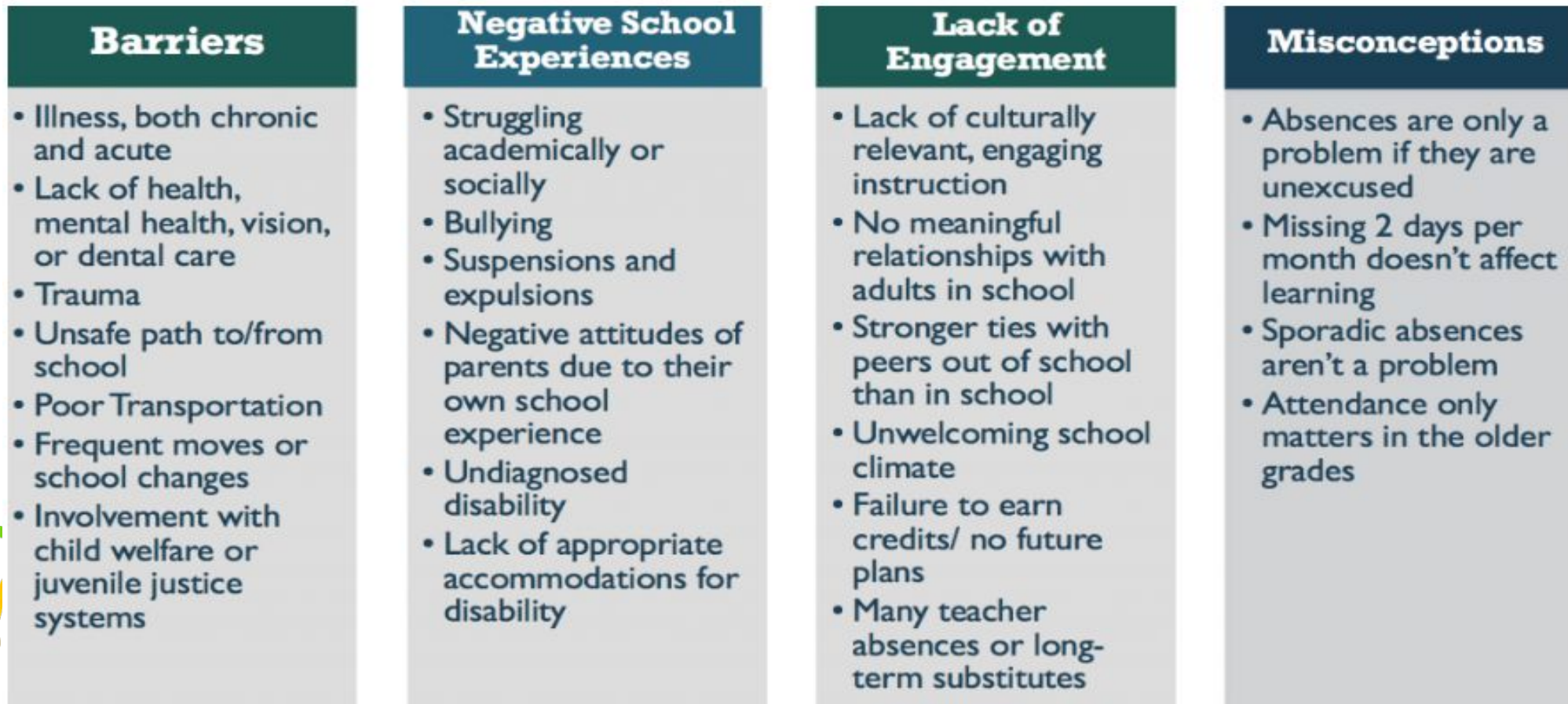Excellent

Great

Good

Needs Improvement

Chronic Absence & AQuESTT

Partnerships/ Relationships	Transitions	Opportunities & Access	CCCR	Assessment	Educator Effectiveness
	O -1	**+1 +0**		**+1 +0 -1**	
	51% **4 Year Graduation Rate**	50% **Chronic Absenteeism**		50% **Score Improvement**	
	49% **Extended Graduation**	50% **Progress towards English proficiency**		35% **Non-Proficiency Reduction**	
				5% **Science Proficiency**	
				10% **Science Score Improvement**	

Evidence Based Analysis **+1 +0**

The data tell you one part of the story...

Factors that Contribute to Chronic Absence

Barriers	**Negative School Experiences**	**Lack of Engagement**	**Misconceptions**
• Illness, both chronic and acute • Lack of health, mental health, vision, or dental care • Trauma • Unsafe path to/from school • Poor Transportation • Frequent moves or school changes • Involvement with child welfare or juvenile justice systems	• Struggling academically or socially • Bullying • Suspensions and expulsions • Negative attitudes of parents due to their own school experience • Undiagnosed disability • Lack of appropriate accommodations for disability	• Lack of culturally relevant, engaging instruction • No meaningful relationships with adults in school • Stronger ties with peers out of school than in school • Unwelcoming school climate • Failure to earn credits/ no future plans • Many teacher absences or long-term substitutes	• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused • Missing 2 days per month doesn't affect learning • Sporadic absences aren't a problem • Attendance only matters in the older grades

Three Tiers of Intervention

Three Tiers of Intervention

For more information, visit www.attendanceworks.org

TIER 1 vention
- Engaging school climate
- Positive relationships with students and families
- Impact of absences on achievement widely understood
- Chronic absence data monitored
- Good and improved attendance recognized
- Common barriers identified and addressed

Students missing 5–9% (at risk)

Students missing less than 5% (satisfactory)

TIER 2 Early Intervention
- Personalized early outreach
- Action plan addresses barriers and increases engagement
- Caring mentors

Students missing 10–19% (moderate chronic absence)

TIER 3 Specialized supports
- Coordinated school and interagency response
- Legal intervention (last resort)

Students missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)

Low Cost

Individualized

High Cost

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Create a school climate that encourages students to come to school everyday, welcoming culture of attendance
Cultivate an atmosphere where students feel respected and safe, share visuals (bulletin boards, banners, posters) that reflect attendance messaging.

Provide information and attention that underscores concern for children
Call or send letter to alert family to attendance concerns and explore what help may be needed.

Assess student and family needs and intensify outreach
Work with relevant agencies to develop a comprehensive educational plan that also address student and family needs
Share data with appropriate agencies.

Attendance Works©
Advancing Student Success By Reducing Chronic Absence

Resources

NEBRASKA EVERY DAY COUNTS!

Each year in Nebraska, almost 36,000 students are chronically absent.
This absenteeism disproportionately affects students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students. There are many steps educators can take to address chronic absence within their schools.

How does Nebraska define chronic absenteeism?
A student is chronically absent when they miss 10% of their time in membership.
Examples:
1) Blake is enrolled in his school for 50 days, and misses 5. He is chronically absent.
2) Mona misses 18 days of school out of her district's 175. She is chronically absent.
3) Cora misses 3 days of her 130 enrolled days. She is not chronically absent.

How is chronic absence different from truancy?

Truancy	Vs.	Chronic Absence
• Counts only unexcused absences • Emphasizes compliance with school rules • Relies on legal and administrative solutions		• Counts all absences: excused, unexcused, and suspensions • Emphasizes academic impact of missed days • Uses community-based, positive strategies

What resources are available to help me accurately record and report students who are chronically absent?
We know each student situation is unique. The NDE provides guidance around this topic. Search the NDE website at education.ne.gov for:
• Rule 2: Uniform System of Accounting
• ADVISER: Who Reports What
• ADVISER: Data Elements

When in doubt, contact the Nebraska Department of Education Help Desk for guidance. They can be reached at ADVISERHelp@Nebraskacloud.org or 888.285.0556.

NEBRASKA EVERY DAY COUNTS!

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Why absenteeism matters:
• Absenteeism in the first month of school can predict poor attendance throughout the school year. Half the students who miss 2 to 4 days in September go on to miss nearly a month of school.
• Absenteeism and its ill effects start early. One in 10 kindergarten and first grade students are chronically absent.
• Poor attendance can influence whether children read proficiently by the end of third grade or are held back.
• By 6th grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.
• Research shows that missing 10 percent of the school year, or about 18 days in most school districts, negatively affects a student's academic performance. That's just two days a month and that's known as chronic absence.
• Students who live in communities with high levels of poverty are four times more likely to be chronically absent than others, often for reasons beyond their control, such as unstable housing, unreliable transportation, and a lack of access to healthcare.
• When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating.
• Attendance improves when schools engage students and parents in positive ways and when schools provide mentors for chronically absent students.

NEBRASKA EVERY DAY COUNTS!

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Why absenteeism matters:
• Absenteeism in the first month of school can predict poor attendance throughout the school year. Half the students who miss 2 to 4 days in September go on to miss nearly a month of school.
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• When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating.
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Attendance Works Resources
(Improving Attendance)

Leading Attendance: A Toolkit for Principals

Strategies for improving attendance include:

- Cultivate a school-wide culture of attendance

- Use chronic absence data to determine need for additional supports

- Develop staff capacity to adopt effective attendance practices

- Advocate for resources and policies to improve attendance.

Attendance Works Resources
(Conducting a School Self-Assessment)

- **Self-Assessment Tools**
  https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/self-assessment/

Instructions for Conducting A School Self-Assessment

The goal of this self-assessment is to help school leaders identify strengths and opportunities to develop a systemic approach to reducing chronic absence. Ideally, this assessment is completed in partnership with a team. Below is a suggested process.

1. **Bring together a team of key stakeholders** in your school to complete this self-assessment. Participants should include the principal, attendance personnel, classroom teachers, staff from partnering community agencies, and if possible, active parents. Feel free to expand this list to include others that you think might have valuable insights to offer about student attendance in your school.

2. **Identify one person** who will assume responsibility for facilitating the process and dialogue.

3. **Ask each participant** to spend 10 minutes completing the tool.

4. **Hand out an extra copy of the tool** and ask all participants to add in their responses on a single copy with a hatch mark. Make copies of the version with everyone's responses. (An alternative option is to put up an enlarged copy of the tool on the wall and ask participants to add their responses using a marker. This approach allows everyone to see the collective responses without the need for additional copies.) (See: **Instructions for Using Self-Assessment Tool**)

5. **As a group, review the collective results.** Encourage participants to identify and explore where there appear to be differences in how stakeholders have ranked a particular element. Use this as an opportunity find out why stakeholders might have different perspectives. Keep in mind that the goal is to deepen understanding of why the differences of opinion might exist; agreeing upon a rating is not essential.

6. **Develop a plan.** Participants should discuss what they see as the biggest gaps or priorities to address in the near future. If needed, use dots or take hand vote to agree upon the top three next steps. For each one, discuss: 1) Who needs to be involved in advancing this priority? 2) What are immediate next steps? 3) Who can take responsibility for ensuring follow-up occurs? Determine how to stay in communication with each other about progress on the next steps and decide whether a follow-up meeting is needed.

7. **Communicate the results:** The team should communicate the results of the assessment with school (and potentially district) staff and community partners and engage them in executing the plan.

Attendance Works Resources
(Effective Messaging)

Effective Messaging with Families and Students

- Keep the tone positive, non-threatening and supportive, whether you are speaking face-to-face or in writing.

- Available resources include sample back to school letters, infographics, visual reminders (banner, posters) and parent handouts.

Sample Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Attending school has a huge impact on student success. This year we want to make sure every student misses no more than 9 days of school, or 1 day a month. We need your help.

Some Attendance Tips to Promote Student Learning:

- Make sure your students keep a regular bedtime and establish a morning routine so they are rested and alert when they get to school.
- Turn off all electronics including TVs, phones and tablets at bedtime.
- Make sure clothes and pack backpacks are ready the night before.
- Check with our school nurse or office staff if you are not sure about when to keep your child at home due to illness.
- Avoid scheduling vacations or doctor's appointments when school is in session.
- Talk to teachers and counselors for advice if your student feel anxious about going to school.
- Develop back up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, neighbor, or another parent to take your student to school.

Please let us know how we can best support you and your student so that they can show up for school on time every day.

Sincerely,

Attendance Works Resources
(Teaching Attendance Curriculum)

- Getting Started with the Attendance Works Teaching Attendance Curriculum on TeachingReady!

  - Module 1: Why We Teach Attendance

  - Module 2: Creating a Culture of Attendance-Primary Grades

    Creating a Culture of Attendance-Secondary Grades

  - Module 3: Using Data for Intervention and Support-Primary Grades

    Using Data for Intervention and Support-Secondary Grades

Attendance Works Resources
(Year-long Planning)

- <u>Year-Long Planning</u>
  - Tools to support year-long activities and events to maintain an emphasis on improving attendance.

- <u>Attendance Activities School Year Plan</u>
  - (K-12)Aligned to the Three Tiers of Intervention (slide 16).

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